



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May10, 2016

Contact: Al Naipo, (213) 974-2222

Email: anaipo@bos.lacounty.gov

Preserving Our Options to Fund the Fight Against Homelessness

Over several hours of impassioned testimony, dozens of advocates for the homeless urged the Board of Supervisors to approve a motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl that would keep all options open for addressing Los Angeles County's crisis of homelessness.

The Board voted to continue discussing the motion next Tuesday.

It has been weighing several options to pay for programs to help the homeless, from redirecting Measure B revenue to imposing a parcel tax, a marijuana tax, a sales tax, or a tax on personal income exceeding \$1 million per year.

Preserving the last option requires an amendment to State law. Supervisors Ridley-Thomas and Kuehl's motion directs the Board to "pursue a change in State law to grant counties the authority to seek voter approval of a tax on personal income above \$1 million/year to combat homelessness."

"I think we need to be resolute and charge the state Legislature and the Governor with the opportunity and/or the obligation to help us to fight, end, work on, eradicate, address this issue of homelessness, which is worsening as we speak," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said.

"If the state Legislature chooses not to do it, it won't because we failed to make the request," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas added. "We would want to be recorded as having moved an agenda that sought to raise the dignity and worth of all Angelenos."

According to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's 2016 Homeless Count, 46,874 people are homeless on any given night in Los Angeles County a 6 percent increase from last year. Still, the number of homeless veterans

declined 30 percent, and there are 18 percent fewer homeless persons among families with children.

Supervisor Kuehl said, "As the new Homeless Count showed us, it's incumbent on us to explore our options for developing a sustainable revenue stream to support the County's homelessness initiative."

"The Homeless Count results showing diminishing numbers in our veteran's and families' homeless populations demonstrates that this problem responds to resources," she added. "It's time now for government, business, and residents to resolve to find those resources."

Phil Ansell, director of the County's Homeless Initiative, noted recent polling found 68 percent of likely voters would support a sales tax increase to fund programs for the homeless. An even larger number, 76 percent, would back a tax increase on incomes exceeding \$1 million.

More than 100 people signed up to testify before the Board on the issue, including some who had experienced homelessness first hand, and some who provide services to the homeless every day.

Alex Johnson, executive director of the Children's Defense Fund, said, "We have a moral obligation to improve the quality of life of those who are homeless, sleeping in shelters and cars and hotels, or doubled up on a couch. Innumerable individuals are just one paycheck, one illness, one family crisis away from homelessness."

People Assisting The Homeless (PATH) executive director Katie Hill said, "In over 30 years of operating, we've never seen so much public attention focused on homeless or the public support, as indicated by the polling results, to implement and fund long-term solutions. The public is asking for action, and is willing to invest. This motion is a necessary step towards providing the critical resources needed to ensure our ability to end homeless in our communities."

"I know raising taxes is always going to be something that divides this Board room, but I do think we should at least keep the option open," Eric Ares with the Los Angeles Community Action Network said. "This is not about voting for the tax, but about keeping the option open, keeping the debate going"

"We have unprecedented political will on the part of the supervisors, the voters, the advocacy community, service providers, the city," Ares added. "This is our moment to make this happen so, at the very least, we shouldn't be shutting the door to the idea that we could do this."

###